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2001HANOI02924 - UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED PTQ1670

PAGE 01 HANOI 02924 01 OF 02 081012Z
ACTION EAP-00

INFO	LOG-00	AID-00	AMAD-00	CIAE-00	DODE-00	SRPP-00	DS-00
	EB-00	UTED-00	H-01	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	LAB-01
	L-00	NSAE-00	OIC-02	OPIC-01	PC-01	PRS-00	P-00
	SCT-00	SP-00	SS-00	STR-00	TEST-00	TRSE-00	USIE-00
	DSCC-00	PRM-00	DRL-02	G-00	NFAT-00	SAS-00	/008W

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FM AMEMBASSY HANOI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4624
AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY
USMISSION GENEVA
ASEAN COLLECTIVE
USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI
DIA WASHDC
NSC WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HANOI 002924

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/BCLTV AND EAP/PD
DEPARTMENT ALSO FOR DRL/IRF
CINCPAC FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM KIRF VM HUMANR RELFREE](#)

SUBJECT: HOA HAO MONK THREATENING IMMOLATION

UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 02 HANOI 02924 01 OF 02 081012Z
[1](#)1. (SBU) ON NOVEMBER 8, CONGEN POLOFF CONTACTED TWO HOA HAO BUDDHIST ELDERS IN HCMC TO CONFIRM DETAILS OF A NOVEMBER 6 PRESS RELEASE BY A U.S.-BASED HOA HAO ORGANIZATION THAT A HOA HAO MONK WAS THREATENING SELF-IMMOLATION. POLOFF CALLED TRAN HUU DUYEN, A HOA HAO ELDER WHO WAS RELEASED FROM PRISON UNDER A 1998 AMNESTY, BY TELEPHONE. POLOFF ALSO CALLED LE QUANG LIEM (LQL), THE HOA HAO ELDER CURRENTLY UNDER HOUSE ARREST FOR MEETING WITH A GROUP IN HCMC WHOM POLICE BELIEVE WERE PREPARING THEMSELVES FOR IMMOLATION. (NOTE: TWO DAYS AFTER LQLQS ARREST, A FEMALE HOA HAO FOLLOWER AND MEMBER OF LQLQS UNOFFICIAL HOA HAO CHURCH DID COMMIT SELF-IMMOLATION. END NOTE.) BOTH DUYEN AND LQL CONFIRMED THE STORY IN THE PRESS RELEASE AND ADDED DETAILS OF THEIR OWN.

[1](#)2. (SBU) VO THANH LIEM (ALSO KNOWN AS NAM LIEM) WHO RESIDES IN CHO MOI DISTRICT OF THE MEKONG DELTA PROVINCE OF AN GIANG, TURNED HIS HOME INTO A PAGODA SEVERAL YEARS AGO, AND DOZENS OF HOA HAO FOLLOWERS WORSHIP THERE ON A DAILY BASIS. ACCORDING TO DUYEN AND LQL, ON NOVEMBER 1, NAM LIEM ORGANIZED A HOA HAO PRAYER CEREMONY AT HIS HOME. WHAT HE DID DIFFERENTLY ON THIS OCCASION THAN DURING PREVIOUS PRAYER CEREMONIES WAS TO DISPLAY THE HOA HAO FLAG AND HANG PICTURES OF THE HOA HAO FOUNDER IN HIS PAGODA.

[1](#)3. (SBU) ACCORDING TO LQL, POLICE CAME TO THE PAGODA AND ORDERED NAM LIEM TO TAKE DOWN THE
UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 03 HANOI 02924 01 OF 02 081012Z
OFFENDING FLAG AND PHOTOGRAPHS. WHEN NAM LIEM REFUSED, THE POLICE ORDERED ALL THE PEOPLE WHO HAD COME TO THE PAGODA TO WORSHIP TO RETURN TO THEIR HOMES. ACCORDING TO DUYEN, POLICE RETURNED LATER IN THE EVENING AND BROKE INTO THE PAGODA WITH THE PURPOSE OF TAKING DOWN THE FLAG AND PHOTOS. WHILE THE POLICE WERE INSIDE, NAM LIEM CLOSED THE DOOR FROM THE OUTSIDE AND LOCKED THEM IN. AFTER SEVERAL ATTEMPTS TO BREAK THE DOOR DOWN, THE POLICE HAD TO SHOOT THE LOCK OFF TO GET OUT.

[1](#)4. (SBU) FOR THE NEXT SEVERAL DAYS, THE POLICE MAINTAINED A PRESENCE AT THE PAGODA AND DID NOT ALLOW ANY HOA HAO FOLLOWERS TO ENTER. ACCORDING TO LQL, NAM LIEM HAD SEVERAL HEATED EXCHANGES WITH THE POLICE AND, ON NOVEMBER 6, CLIMBED UP A KNOTTY PINE

TREE BEHIND THE PAGODA CARRYING A 5-LITER CONTAINER OF GASOLINE AND A KNIFE THREATENING TO KILL HIMSELF IF THE POLICE DID NOT GO AWAY. BOTH LQL AND DUYEN TOLD POLOFF THAT AS OF THE AFTERNOON OF NOVEMBER 8, NAM LIEM WAS STILL UP IN THE TREE THREATENING TO IMMOLATE HIMSELF. DUYEN ADDED THAT NAM LIEM HAD CUT HIMSELF WITH THE KNIFE, BUT THAT THE INJURY WAS MINOR. BOTH LQL AND DUYEN SAID DOZENS OF POLICE ARE ON HAND - THEY ARE TRYING TO PERSUADE NAM LIEM TO COME DOWN; THEY ARE ALSO KEEPING CURIOUS ONLOOKERS AWAY FROM THE PAGODA AND TELLING THEM TO GO HOME.

15. (U) FURTHER BACKGROUND: NAM LIEM WAS INVOLVED IN A SIMILAR INCIDENT IN 1996. AT THAT TIME, HE HAD
UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 04 HANOI 02924 01 OF 02 081012Z
REFUSED TO SIGN A DOCUMENT TO ALLOW LOCAL AUTHORITIES TO TEAR DOWN A GATE HE HAD BUILT WITHOUT PERMISSION AT THE ENTRANCEWAY LEADING FROM THE VILLAGEQS MAIN ROAD TO HIS PAGODA. WHEN POLICE CAME TO ARREST HIM, HE CLIMBED UP THE SAME TREE. HE STAYED THERE FOR FOUR DAYS. WITNESSES SAID AT THAT TIME THAT HUNDREDS OF POLICEMEN WERE NEEDED TO KEEP SEVERAL THOUSAND SPECTATORS AWAY FROM THE AREA. (NAM LIEMQS PAGODA IS IN A WOODED COMPOUND LOCATED ABOUT 100 YARDS FROM THE MAIN ROAD SITUATED IN THE MIDDLE OF SURROUNDING GREEN RICE PADDIES.)

16. (U) WHEN NAM LIEM CAME DOWN FROM THE TREE IN 1996, HE WAS TAKEN INTO CUSTODY, CHARGED WITH INTERFERING WITH THE DUTIES OF A POLICE OFFICER, AND SENTENCED TO TWO YEARS IN PRISON. HE IS FAMOUS LOCALLY, KNOWN AS QTHE MAN WHO CLIMBED THE TREE.Q

17. (U) POLOFF SPENT A HALF DAY WITH NAM LIEM IN JULY 1999, SEVERAL MONTHS AFTER HE HAD FINISHED HIS PRISON SENTENCE. POLOFF FOUND HIM TO BE INTENSELY SPIRITUAL AND EXTREMELY CHARISMATIC. AT ONE POINT DURING THEIR MEETING, NAM LIEM SHOWED POLOFF A SCAR ON THE SIDE OF HIS KNEE. HE SAID HE HAD BIT HIMSELF THERE WHILE IN PRISON Q TO DEMONSTRATE TO HIS JAILERS THAT HE WAS NOT AFRAID OF PAIN.

COMMENT

18. (SBU) NAM LIEM IS NOT PART OF LQLQS RENEGADE HOA HAO SECT. HE APPEARS TO HAVE HIS OWN FOLLOWING IN AND AROUND AN GIANG PROVINCEQS CHO MOI DISTRICT. POLOFF BELIEVES HE WOULD NOT HESITATE TO RESORT TO IMMOLATION IF HE FELT IT NECESSARY. AS LONG AS POLICE USE PERSUASION, RATHER THAN FORCE, HOWEVER, THE THREATENED IMMOLATION MAY BE AVOIDED. THAT THE STANDOFF IS NOW IN ITS THIRD DAY IS AN ENCOURAGING SIGN THAT NEITHER SIDE IS RUSHING TO ACTION.

PORTER

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